

INTERPRETING IGBO INNUENDO NAMES: A PRAGMATIC APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

The paper argued that Igbo innuendo names perform pragmatic acts and the name givers engage in illocutionary acts to communicate their intentions to the hearer. The paper acknowledged that the acts are intention –inference base. Igbo innuendo names are natural expressions or utterances that can flout maxims; but whenever maxims are breached in them it leads to implicature. And given the inferential ability of the hearer and the mutual knowledge or cooperation shared by the name giver and the hearer it is difficult for the Igbo innuendo names to flout maxim. The paper suggested that hearers should rely on the name giver's illocutionary force, intention, and their inferential ability in interpreting the names. The theoretical framework adopted is Bach and Harnish(1979) mutual contextual belief which states that every speech exhibits an act known as speech act which is intention –inference based. Our data were collected introspectively.

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INTRODUCTION

Every utterance made by a speaker performs a particular action. Speech acts are social acts of doing. In speaking, speakers purposefully do things with words. They are actions such as informing, commanding, warning, preaching congratulating, swearing betting, etc. which are performed in using words. (See Austin 1962, 1975 and Searle 1979). Every action performed by a speaker carries a force which is known as illocutionary force. Some English verbs help to make explicit the speech act a speaker wishes to perform. A speech has three kinds of acts it may perform – illocutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary. A speech act can be direct and indirect. It has been observed that a speaker can say something, means something and in addition means something else. This is the position of Searle's indirect speech act theory.

Pragmatics seeks to explain how extra-linguistic factors cause language users to communicate their intended meanings the way they do. In language use, the meanings of the words as used are not always determined by the actual words used. For instance, a word in a sentence can invoke several meanings. The proper understanding of the contextual features or speech undertone helps a lot to enhance meanings and understanding. Pragmatics emphasizes the appropriate use of language in situated contexts. As observed by Crystal (1997, p.20) quoted in Idowu (2012, p.128)" pragmatics and semantics both take into account such notions as the intentions of the speaker, the effect of the utterance on the listeners, the implications that follow for expressing something in a certain way, and the knowledge, beliefs and pre-suppositions about the world upon which speakers and listeners rely when they interact."

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

From the view of Kent Bach and Robert Harnish (1979), every speech exhibits an act known as speech act which is intention – inference based. To them, every speaker performs an illocutionary act for effective communication; the listener has to understand the speaker’s act via mutual contextual beliefs (MCBs). For them every interaction or conversation must involve an inferential process. The inferential process is inevitable in any communication event; hence their term “speech act schemata (SAS)”. The theory – Mutual Contextual Beliefs was formulated by Kent Bach and Robert Harnish (1979). In this theory they posit that mutual contextual beliefs between the speaker and the hearer propels an inferential process because whatever inference made or should be made by a hearer does not necessarily depend on what the speaker says but on the contextual knowledge shared commonly between them,

According to Acheoah and Olaleye (2017, p.23)

Bach and Harnish theory helps to explain the vital components of natural communication: what words mean, what the speaker literally says when using them, and what the speaker means and intend to communicate by using those words, which often goes considerably beyond what is said. What someone says is determined by the conversational meaning of the sentence uttered and contextual processes of disambiguation and inference making. What the speaker implicates can be calculated from the rational principles of maxims governing conversation. What is said is connected to the literal content of the utterance, whereas what is implicated (the implicature) is connected to the non-literal component (what is intentionally communicated without being covertly said by the speaker). A part of linguistic knowledge, contextual information plays a role in determining what is said. Despite the potential of language to mean beyond the sentence, messages reflect physical form in which the mastery of linguistic convention is instrumental to pragmatic or extra-linguistic communication. The most useful notion of saying is that what is said should be closely related to the conventional meaning of the uttered sentence.

Bach and Harnish’s attempt to integrate Grice, Searle and others theory gave birth to their unified theory known as mutual contextual beliefs.

Having known these, the hearer understands what a speaker has said at the locutionary level and makes references based on the linguistic meaning plus the contextual information concerning the speaker’s intention. Mutual contextual beliefs emphasizes the need for the hearer to understand the speaker’s intention which is known as “Reflexive – intension” (R-intentions). (see Acheoah and Olaleye 2017, p.27).

To Bach and Harnish, to communicate is to express an attitude such as belief, an intention, a desire etc.

Speech Acts and Igbo Innuendo Names

Igbo innuendo names performs some pragmatic acts that are much more than stating propositions or emotions. The names serve as both linguistic and social tools that communicate the giver’s intention, feelings and request. The Igbo innuendo name givers try to engage in illocutionary acts as formulated by Searle (1979) such as expressive-expressing their intentions, directive-directing people’s behaviour, representative-representing the real world and commissive- committing people to action. The idea of acts of speech was expressed in Austin’s (1962) *How to do things with words*; which was published post-humously. This was later developed by his student, Searle in United States.

In improving Austin (1962) speech acts Searle proffered five types of illocutionary acts. According to Searle (1979, p.vii) “we tell people how things are (assertive), we try to make them do things(directive),we commit ourselves to doing things(commisive),we express our feelings and attitude(expressive),and we bring about changes in the world through our utterances”(declaration).

Let us consider these names

- (1)Ònyegàapùrùibèya (who vacates for the other?)
- (2)Àmàndìanàèzè (one does not know whom to avoid?)
- (3)Ònyebüenyì (who is a friend indeed?)

The acts perform by 1, 2 and 3 here are interrogatives, although they are obviously statements that are highly suggestive. No 1 name suggests that no one will leave (no one would be intimidated out of his/her bonafide abode) for another. No 2 name suggests that nobody is trustworthy and no 3 name suggests that no one is a friend (suggesting further that only God is a true friend). They are examples of indirect speech acts. Indirect speech acts are conventionalized or standardized (see Reimer 1995 and Bach 1995). Searle (1975b, p.168) explains indirect speech act, in this manner: “In such cases a sentence that contains the illocutionary force indicator for one kind of illocutionary act can be uttered to perform, in addition, another type of illocutionary act.” Direct speech Act is performed when an utterance is used with a particular illocutionary force typically associated with it.

From the view of the British tradition known as the ordinary language philosophy, “meaning does not stem from testing for truth or falsity.” According to (1905,:p. 20) “meaning is use.” This tradition – the ordinary language philosophy has its representatives as far back as 1930. This tradition emphasizes speech as the basic unit of analysis instead of the sentence or utterance. As Jaszczolt (2003) observed“This analysis has one main advantage over truth conditional semantics in that it accounts for sentences which do not have clear truth condition as they do not express an obvious preposition” (p.294).

On many occasions it is impossible to analyze an utterance in terms of a proposition to take for example sentence (4) – (6)

- (4)Ònyebùchi? (Who is God?)
- (5)Ònyeañùlà (Don’t rejoice)
- (6)Akamàchi (If not God)

These sentential names do not express propositions; they do things so to speak. They are act of doing thing through speaking of speech acts. The unit of linguistic communication is a speech act and not sentence or utterance. This is an act that depends on the intentions of the speaker and the hearer. Speech acts are a little like physical acts (hitting a ball) and a little like mental act (imagining hitting a ball). They are used to perform various functions such as to ask question;to give order, andto threaten etc. For instance, in the name no (4)Onyebuchi(who is God?)is assertive/ informative. The name giver tries to rely reflect the intention that in life nobody determines anyone’s destiny except God. In the name no (5) Onyeañula (don’t rejoice over people’s misfortune since no one can predict tomorrow). The illocutionary act performed is directive. The intention is to direct people to virtuous living. While the name no (6)Akamachi (if not God we would have been consumed).The illocutionary act involved is commissive. The name giver’s intention is to committhemselves to

accepting that God is their last resort in life.

In using innuendo personal names, givers unconsciously or consciously try to uphold the various categories of what Austin called performatives- using utterances to do something other than merely saying something. Austin's five categories of performative include expositive, verdictives, habitiveexercitives and commissives which were recast by his student Searle, into what he calls their "points" or purpose", assertive (expositive which commit the hearer to the truth of a proposition) as in the innuendo names 7) Òwàjùrùeziokwū, (the world rejects the truth) (8) Ònwùzùrùwà (death is all over the world). directive (verdictives), which gets the hearer to believe in such a way as to make his/her behaviour match with the propositional as in (9) Hapùrùchìokwū, (leave the challenge for God) (10) Chisàaramòkwū (let God reply for me). Contents of the directives (commissives) commits the speakers to undertake a course of action represented in the proposition content; as in (11) Ònyekàozùrù, (Who is satisfied in life?), (12) Àmàndjanàezè (who knows who to avoid?). Expressive (bahabitives) which express sincerely condition of the speech act (13) Akamàchi (if not God), and deliberative (exercitives) which brings about a change in the world. Austin performatives here are represented in the parenthesis (see Wardhaugh 2010, p.305).

Co-Operative Principle and Igbo Innuendo Personal Names

In a given linguistic interaction, there is usually an expected cooperation between the speaker and the hearer. This cooperation is guided by some unwritten rules or principles of the language. Williams and John (2000) explains that it is a principle of interpretation and referencing existing between the speaker and hearer which allow the utterance meaning intended by the speaker to be effectively inferred by the hearer. The principle is guided by the Grice's four maxims of conversation. Grice also explains that it is an interpretative procedure that enables communication between a speaker and hearer to be effective. It is the mutual understanding that must take effect before an effective communication is realized. Maxims are used to arrive at conversational implicature. When speakers and hearers cooperatively contribute to the conversation meaning are usually implicated. Certain aspects of meaning cannot be interpreted or understood by truth conditional semantics. In our pragmatic analysis, we intend to reject the truth conditional semantics as not adequate but replace it with the theory of language use. To help the matter, we have made some pragmatic explanations of certain phenomena and combine them with semantic analysis. Having find out that people can mean more than, or something different from what they have said. Example;

(14) *Nwajùtò* (the child binds the relationship), (15) *Nwakānwānyìnjò* (a child is more important to a woman), (16) *Madùbùnjòàlà* (man is the evil in the land), (17) *Ònyeerìōnwū* (no one is above death), (18) *Amaraàghàrabùtò* (tolerance binds a relationship) etc.

No semantic theory will consider these names as relevant and informative and no semantic theory also will give credence that the name-givers have communicated their knowledge. In (19) *Nwajùtò* (the child binds the relationship), the name implies or suggests that the marital relationship between the father and the mother of the child was almost in shambles save for the birth of the child. In (20) *Nwakānwānyìnjò* (a child is more important to a woman), the name also implies or suggests that: if a woman does not have a child that she is the prime loser not the husband considering the Igbo culture where the husband can easily remarry and gets his/her own child or children. In (21) *Madùbùnjòàlà* (man is the evil in the land) the name implies that human beings are responsible the evil in the world. Meanwhile, we can say that the names have sentence based meaning explained by semantics, with additional meaning which is obtainable by pragmatic implicature. According to Grice (1975 p.214) quoted in Jaszczolt (2002 p.208) "for speakers to mean something by x, the

speaker must intend to induce by x a belief in the hearer. Moreover, the speaker must intend his or her utterance to be recognized as so intended.” Implicatures are inferences that are drawn, from utterances and that are perceived by the hearer as being intended by the speaker.

Implicature can arise out of adherence or non-adherence to or flouting of maxims. Examples can be drawn from (22) *Madùbùnjòlà* (man is the evil in the land), (23) *Onùkaògù* (boldness is better fight) Although these names flout the maxim of quality; the hearers can infer the name givers’ intention. Implicature has other properties which include detachability, calculability and non-conventionality (see Jaszczolt 2002:p. 213, Levinson 1983, p.114-117, Horn 1988, p.123). Most implicatures are context dependent or particularized while some are context independence or generalized conventional implicature. In context dependent or particularized implicature, implicatures are drawn from a particular context. In the context independent or generalized conversational implicature, implicature arises independently of the context of utterance. Example, (A) is a generalized implicature of (B)

- (A)(24) *Madūabūghīchī* (man is not God)
- (B) The name-giver believes that no man is another’s fortune (*Madūabūghīchī*)

Jaszczolt alluding to Grice (1975) asserts that: “If the maxims are breached or ostentatiously flouted, the hearer infers that the speaker must have meant something else. That is that the speaker must have had some special reason for not observing the maxims”(p.32) The cooperation between communicators is what known as cooperative principle.

Jaszczolt (2002,p.209) observes that:

Communication is about intention and inferences. A recognition of an intention may directly influence its fulfillment: speaker’s intentions to inform the addressee about something are fulfilled by being recognized by the addressee. Communication is successful not when the addressee recognizes the linguistic meaning from the utterance but when he or she infers the speaker’s meaning. This is meant by tenet the communication is about intentions and inferences. The mechanisms according to which interlocutors recognize the intentions of the speaker is given in Grice’s theory of meaning NN comprising the idea of co-operation discussed in what follows.

In human communication engagement, a great deal of co-operation is needed. There are certain principles of conversation that guide participants to engage in a communicative transaction. This principle is what Grice called cooperative principle. Grice (1975) cooperative principle instructed that “participants should make their conversation such as required, at the stage at which it occurs by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged.”(26) According to Jaszczolt (2002, p.210), “the principle breaks down into maxims that summarize particular assumptions about conversation.” Different pragmaticists proposed different numbers of these maxims but as originally proposed by Grice (1975, 25-26), the principle contains four sets of maxims:

The Maxim of Quantity

- Make your contribution is informative as required (for current purpose of the exchange).
- Do not make your contribution more informative than is required

The Maxim of Quality

Try to make your contribution one that is true

- Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.
- Do not say what you believe to be false.

The Maxim of Relation

- Be relevant

The Maxims of Manner

Be perspicuous:

- Avoid obscurity of expression
- Avoid ambiguity
- Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity)
- Be orderly

We also have to add that these maxims are not only applicable in conversations; they are also required to apply in any form of human communication. William (2009, p.146):

These maxims are principles governing the references conversational partners draw; they are not rules that you have to follow to produce interactive or socially acceptable or correct utterances. Thus people often lie and are not above formulating their utterances in obscure ways intentionally and unintentionally. However, speaker flout most of the maxims for reasons, such as to achieve particular effects for example apart from pathological liars, people usually lie for a reason, to achieve some end. In this respect the maxims are unlike grammatical rules such as an adjective must agree in gender and number with the noun it modifies. If a language has grammatical rules speakers must consistently obey it (excluding speech errors)..

On this backdrop, Emezue (2011) emphasized:

Generally speaking a flouting of any of these maxims is expected to give rise to misinterpretation of an utterance. But since in pragmatics utterances are interpretable in pragmatics in consideration of the context and situation of use, we cannot strictly say that the particular maxim has been flouted. For instance, the maxim of quality appears to have been flouted in the following note from Ade to Obinna (p.39)

Obinna dear,

Bring that thing so that we can see him as planned,

Thanks,

Ade

The above note would be seen as lacking in adequate information if the addressee and the addressor do not share the same background information or common knowledge to both Ade and Obinna, the information is quantitative: the thing to be brought, to him that is to be seen and the plan made are known.

Moreover, Jaszczolt (2001) also observes that:

Grice does not claim that these maxims cover all the conversational assumption. He admits that we may need others. Moreover, in addition to these conversational maxims there are also social, aesthetic and other principles that explain, for example polite behaviour. The maxims seem to be tacitly presumed by the interlocutors... it is this inference based on the presumption of cooperation that Grice calls conversational implicature. The maxims produce inferences that go beyond the literal content of the utterance. In other words, they generate implicature. (p.211)

It will be noteworthy to add that Grice was not the first scholar to observe that speakers mean more than they actually say. Even Mill (1872, p.517) observe thus:

If I say to one, I saw some of your children today; he might be justified in inferring that I did not see than all not because the words mean it, but because if I had seen them all, it is most likely that I should have said so. Though even this cannot be presupposed that I must have known whether the children I saw were all or not. But to carry this colloquial mode of interpreting a statement into logic is something novel.

More so, since we interpret the innuendo Igbo personal names from the pragmatic point of view. We cannot say conveniently that the names flout any of the maxims. For instance, in the Igbo innuendo personal names such as (25) *Ìkpòròsìinàèmemē* (do you think you are undoing me?), (26) *Ònyegàapùrùibèya* (who leaves for the other?), (27) *Òbùmnàekè* (Am I the creator?), (28) *Ùwànjùrùeziokwū* (People reject the truth), (29) *Ngwànchiwaorōwēwēndaàkòñkeonyeōdō* (people leaves their faults to discuss other's faults) should have given rise to the flout of maxim of quality save for the fact that the hearer can interpret the message correctly through inferential processing. Emphatically, Searle (1962) states "in speaking I attempt to communicate certain things to my hearer by getting him to recognize my intention to communicate these things" (p.42). Grice (1957) considered this type of intention as *reflexive intention*. For Grice, a speaker is expected to infuse or induce an effect on the hearer by enabling them recognize his intention.

CONCLUSIONS

Maxims are principles unlike rules that must be obeyed. Naturally, these maxims are flouted for one reasons or the other. And at any time maxim is breached the inferential mechanism in the hearer is activated then meaning is implicated. In our study of Igbo innuendo names, the innuendo name givers may flout these maxims as to enable them communicate their feelings the way they wish. Pragmatically, the intention of the name givers are made available for the hearers for adequate inference and that is one of the reasons Igbo innuendo personal names are not often misinterpreted by their hearers.

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